



**EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA**

Moonah Place Yarralumla ACT 2600

**Office of Public Affairs**  
Telephone: (61) (2) 6214 5874  
Facsimile: (61) (2) 6273 3051

**Remarks by U.S. Ambassador Robert D. McCallum at the Australian  
War Memorial Air Medal Awards Ceremony**

**Issued: April 14, 2008**

The Honorable Dr. Mike Kelly, Air Marshall Geoff Shepherd,  
Major General Steve Gower, Lt Col Gene Rossel, members and  
family of the Royal Australian Air Force Transport Flight Vietnam,  
distinguished guests, Returned and Services League members,  
ladies and gentlemen:

I am honored to represent the United States of America at  
this ceremony today where we will present United States Air  
Medals long overdue to more than 80 members or family of  
members of the 35<sup>th</sup> Squadron of the Royal Australian Air Force.

I am particularly honored to present these medals in this most hallowed of military settings, the Australian War Memorial Museum. General Gower, please accept my thanks and that of my country to you and your outstanding staff for hosting this important and meaningful ceremony.

The history of the Australian-U.S. Alliance is a long and storied one, steeped in shared combat, in kinship and mateship. From the trenches of World War I to the unforgiving terrain of Afghanistan today, the soldiers, seamen and airmen of our two countries have stood together in the cause of freedom, not just for our own nations, but for people around the world.

We are here today to recognize a particular group of Australian airmen who in their own particular Australian way wrote a page to that history and made their mark on our countries' alliance.

It was nearly 44 years ago on 8 August 1964, that Squadron Leader Chris Sugden, who passed away just this last week and is represented today by his son, Peter Sugden, led 33 members of the Royal Australian Transport Flight from their new Caribou aircraft onto the tarmac of Vung Tau Air Base, South Vietnam in a driving rain. 7 of those original 33 are here with us today. What followed was nothing short of amazing. For the next 7 ½ years, “Wallaby” airlines with just 6 twin-engine DH-4 Caribous flew over 80,000 missions totaling 47,000 hours. In that time, they carried 677,000 passengers, moved 36 million kilograms of cargo and, probably most importantly to the Australians and Americans deployed throughout Vietnam, over 5 million kilograms of mail. Day and night, sometimes flying in the worst of weather and into the worst terrain and airfields imaginable, the Wallabies got the job done. The Royal Australian Transport Flight, later designated as the 35<sup>th</sup> Squadron was the first RAAF unit to serve in Vietnam and the last to depart. Often under fire, they never lost a man. In short, the men before us today represent a very special aircrew, a

unit of airmen, pilots, support and maintenance personnel who in the well-established tradition of the Royal Australian Air Force, punched above their weight, earned the respect and admiration of their American brothers in arms and have our continuing gratitude today.

The Air Medals we are about to present today are not easily won. They are awarded to valiant aviators who have distinguished themselves in meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight. These medals are recognition of their bravery and sacrifice. I have a joint letter from the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force Chief's of Staff which reads;

“On behalf of the Secretary of the Army, Sergeant Major of the Army, Secretary of the Air Force and the Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, it is our great honor to congratulate this distinguished group of Vietnam veterans from the Royal Australian Air Force. Your receipt of the U.S. Air Medal for your participation, support and heroism in Vietnam is long overdue.

From 1964 to 1972 the Royal Australian Air Force contributed desperately needed squadrons of transport aircraft, helicopters and bombers. RAAF forward air controllers were famous for bringing in air support to save American servicemen on numerous occasions and the U.S. Army could not have sustained itself without the support of the RAAF Transportation Flight Vietnam. For all of you receiving this award today, we applaud and thank you for your courage and dedication. Thank you for your service and congratulations on your receipt of this prestigious and well-deserved award. Signed; George W. Casey, General United States Army Chief of Staff and T. Michael Moseley, General United States Air Force, Chief of Staff. “

Now, it is my honor to present United States Air Medals to the brave men of the 35<sup>th</sup> Squadron with the grateful thanks and admiration of the Government and citizens of the United States of America.